

# Reconstruction after civil war

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Insert of Observations while traveling south: Diary of a Freedmen's Bureau Member

It is with deep sorrow and despair that I write to remind myself of the things I witnessed on my journey to the south, but, what could be the other option, of course there wasn't, I had to make the most cumbersome journey of my life. It was during the emancipation of the northern slaves, just immediately after the American civil wars; thanks to the civil war, I would be a slave somewhere in one of the northern farms at the moment. Working tirelessly under the cruel scorching sun with a whip menacingly dangling from my back, I would be hopeless still. Oh! Memories of these dark moments sicken me. Had I known of the treacherous journey that laid in wait for me, maybe I would have reconsidered my decision to move south? However, I thank God since I arrived here in one piece. The period of the reconstruction was a nightmare to many slaves like me. Working on the large cotton and corn farms was as horrific as the death itself. The mere mentioning of dawn in the life of a slave during these times was itself treacherous as the southern journey. The sucking mincing whip of the master frightened even the sickest worker; mild fevers miraculously disappeared, and we immediately got meticulous in our work. The messengers from the south came in the good news, news of mild freedom, a brighter future and a promising life. None of us wanted to remain and so the civil wars presented just the best moment for our repatriation.

We made almost the entire journey on foot save for a few instances when we used the train or climbed on donkeys backs, wait! It was in turns. None of us had a donkey to himself. The younger ones were given the first consideration. The sick, the old and weaklings got the second opportunity to ride with the donkeys and then women. What was to unfold for men like me?

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For sure the thorns of the desert, the scorching sun of the desert, the cold of Mississippi were just but a few woes to recount. At one instance, I was privileged to ride on one of the few donkeys we had, and this marked the last time I ever removed my feet from the ground. Even though much of the journey could have been made by train, the opportunity presented itself just for a few miles and the old train stalled on the rails, never to move again. We waited eagerly at the train station for a week not to catch a glimpse of any help. All this time we hid ourselves in the bushes. Like animals, our bodies gave rise of hairs and our beards grew long to cover our faces.

A month passed by as we gathered enough food to cater for the remaining part of the journey and our sick to find relief. Six months down the line, dozens of our counterparts had succumbed to cold and hunger on the Death Valley. Time came to re-embark on the southern journey. Families were dismantled. My father had died of scarlet fever, and my mother succumbed to the cold. I and my brother clenched one another's hands, this time round determined to reach the new land. The dangerous desert animals again consumed thousands of us. My brother died of a dangerous snake bite and a friend turned blind due to the snake venom spat on his eyes. Still the thirst across the desert was notwithstanding. Scores were dehydrated to death. Thank God He had taken all my relatives and so I had none to care about. I had the little water to myself. When we finally crossed the borders into the southern territory, our hearts were relieved. A sigh of relief covered our eyes. We had finally escaped from our cruel masters in the north. We had one more thing to overcome, so that we could start a new life in a new land. Where? How? Are questions that kept lingering in our minds. All in all, life was less risky here after all.

### Works Cited

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